



Why your grocery list needs a makeover with hill produce

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Recently, taking a complete U-turn from the usual vegetable bazaars, I decided to check out the indigenous vegetable shops in town. I love to shop for leafy greens and fresh vegetables, and I can never resist the tag of an organic farmer's market and jhum cultivation produce from the hills.

There are a handful of grocery shops that offer spices and cooking ingredients from the hills of Rangamati and Khagrachhari. Suchala Khisa, a hard-working entrepreneur, has run Hill's Fresh Food Bazar in Uttara for the last five years or more. Her small store has earned quite a reputation among the indigenous community and city dwellers.

"Shifting cultivation or jhum chash, practised by our indigenous communities, by clearing and cultivating the hill forests in plots of different sizes, and allowing them to regenerate naturally, yields the best vegetables," says Tenzing Chakma, a designer by profession who loves to cook.

So why do we love the cuisine and spices of the hills? Tenzing's answer to this query of mine was simple; the weather and soil up in the hill forests, and organic farming, brings in all the diversity. "Ginger from the hills has a definite kick in it, unlike the hybrid ones with pale taste grown elsewhere. Rangamati's turmeric is the most sought-after spice in our country. Our pumpkins have a distinct mushy texture, we use taro flowers, and turmeric flowers in our cuisine. We try to keep everything simple and only focus on bringing out the flavour of the vegetable or meat used in the dish," he



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

says.

Khisa's small store is packed with fresh supplies from the hills and is re-stocked every Tuesday and Friday. "My stock of hill produce arrives early morning by bus and by mid-morning my stock is halved. Fuji or wild parsley, sabarang or lemon basil, taro and turmeric flowers, and seasonal roselle and roselle leaves, papaya, grapefruit, pumpkins, bamboo shoots, and many seasonal finds are available in my store," she explains.

The most expensive ingredients she

stocks, besides the chilli and turmeric powder, are her jhum rice grains. Local rice varieties such as chakhao, aromatic black rice, and the most flavoured rice grain binni, which is sticky and sweet, are available in both white and brown variants. But the nutty-flavoured kalijira grain, used mostly for pilaf dishes, stands out for its distinct flavours and textures in her store.

Her store carries a special ghee, or a traditional clarified butter, made in the hills. Nappi or sidol, which is the fermented dried fish paste, used

in most of their recipes, and pahari bon morog (red jungle fowl) are also available.

There is a distinct difference in jhum produce, which makes you want to go back again. While Hill's Fresh Food Bazar brings food produce from the green hills and rainforest areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts, there are many other stores in Dhaka, and online grocery pages too that carry specialised organic condiments and food ingredients from the hills. Community bazaars in Mohammadpur, Kamalapur, Mirpur, Kazipara, and Kalachandpur have been boasting such grocery stores for quite a while now. Besides fresh vegetables, such stores offer shaplapata (stingray), hangor (shark), narkeli (razorbelly minnow), kuchia (eel), and crabs by order only.

My favourite chef Arpon Chakma says that masala or spices are not the hero of Hill Tracts cuisine. "It is always the flavour of leafy herbs that are used at the last moment before finishing cooking that packs in the punch of our dishes. Shell fish and mud crabs cooked with fuji, Sabarang jhol with beef or chicken, fish paturi with wild basil, sabarang nappi side dish with gavi or rice flour; all these recipes use one flavour only. We do not mix too many herbs or spices in our cuisine, we just highlight the Indigenous produce," Arpon Chakma says.

The reason we love hill flavours and want to introduce the use of hilly herbs, spices, and ingredients in our cuisine is because of the characterised blend of flavours that are fresh and tangy giving our palate a distinct change of taste. So, this Friday check out one such store near you and try to make turmeric flower fritters. They are in season now.

Cops working, not effectively

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"Two vehicles have been provided by Rajarbagh Police Lines. We have yet to start going out and arresting suspects," said the officer-in-charge of a police station in the capital, wishing anonymity.

Md Mainul Islam, Inspector General of Police (IGP) admitted the shortcomings.

"We never stopped policing. In some places, police stations were damaged, vandalised... [We] did not have any transport: around 300 vehicles, meant for operations, were destroyed or burnt down. Those police stations need repairs, and its vehicles replaced," he told reporters at the Secretariat.

Officers have been transferred to the areas where there were no police activities, he said. "The new SPs, range DIGs, and commissioners joined their workplaces, and now the work will speed up."

Tabarak Ullah, chief of the 999 service, said the national helpline service officials are trying to assist people with limited workforce and logistics.

Since the fall of the Awami League government, 278 cases have been filed against 94 police members in the capital. The accused include three former inspectors general of police. From constables to high-ranking officials have been accused.

Eight additional inspectors general, seven deputy inspectors general, 12 superintendents of police, 14 additional SPs, six assistant SPs, 12 OCs, eight inspectors, 10 sub-inspectors, and an assistant sub-inspector were among the accused.

Most of the cases were for murder or filed under

the Explosive Substances Act, 1908, and the Arms Act, 1878.

Former DMP additional deputy commissioner Harunor Rashid, popularly known as DB Harun, is accused in the highest 38 cases, ex-IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun in 36 case, former DMP commissioner Habibur Rahman in 33, and former DMP joint commissioner Biplab Kumar Sarkar in 27, according to police data.

Across the country, dozens of cases were filed against police officials. So far, 17 high-ranking police officers, including nine additional IGP, two (supernumerary) additional IGP, five DIGs, and an additional DIG were sent on forced retirement.

Former inspectors general of police AKM Shahidul Hoque and Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, and additional superintendent of police of Dhaka Abdullahil Kafi were arrested.

Immediately after the interim government took over, junior cops, including some cadre officials, went on work abstention demanding, among others, their security and they be not used as political tools.

Quazi Zia Uddin, deputy inspector general of the PHQ, said, "Over 99 percent of policemen re-joined the work."

A high official in the PHQ also said that over 300 cadre officials between DIG and assistant superintendent of police ranks were transferred in the last two weeks.

More than 80 of them were of SP to DIG ranks. They were attached to different police units without assigning any specific job. The number of police is around 2.13 lakh.

People won't have peace until Hasina

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and trial over the hundreds of demonstrators killed during the weeks of unrest that ultimately toppled her.

"She has to be brought back, or the people of Bangladesh won't be at peace. The kind of atrocities she has committed must be addressed through a trial here," Yunus said.

He criticised Hasina's political remarks from India, calling them an "unfriendly gesture" that causes discomfort in both countries.

"If India wants to keep her until the time Bangladesh wants her back, the condition would be that she has to keep quiet," Yunus, 84, told the Press Trust of India news agency.

"No one is comfortable with her stance there in India because we want her back to try her. She is there in India and at times she is talking, which is problematic. Had she been quiet, we would have forgotten it; people would have also forgotten it as she would have been in her own world. But sitting in India, she is speaking and giving instructions. No one likes it," he said.

Hasina has remained

in India, her former government's biggest patron and benefactor, since her August 5 overthrow, inflaming tensions between the two South Asian neighbours.

She made a public statement the week after her arrival calling for Bangladeshis to gather in Dhaka to mark the 1975 assassination of her father, independence hero Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"It is not good for us or for India. There is discomfort regarding it," he said.

Hasina's comments were seen as a provocative effort to galvanise members of her Awami League party and undermine law and order in the fragile first days after Yunus took office.

Asked whether Bangladesh has communicated its stance to India, Yunus said it has been conveyed verbally and quite firmly that she should keep quiet.

"It is not that she has gone there on a normal course. She has fled following a people's uprising and public anger," he said.

Yunus said that while Bangladesh values strong ties with India, New Delhi must move "beyond the narrative that portrays every other

political party except Awami League as Islamist and that the country will turn into Afghanistan without Sheikh Hasina."

Referring to the recent incidents of attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and India flagging concerns about it, Yunus said this is just an "excuse".

"The issue of trying to portray the conditions of minorities in such a big way is just an excuse," he said.

Asked about ways to improve the India-Bangla relations, Yunus said both the countries need to work together and it is on a downhill presently. "We need to work together to improve this relationship, which is now at a low," he said.

Speaking about the future of bilateral treaties with India, Yunus said there are demands for a relook at certain treaties such as transit and the Adani power deal.

"Everybody is saying that it is needed. We will see what is on paper and, second, what is actually happening on the ground. I can't answer it specifically. If there is any need to review, we will then raise questions about it," he said.

S Alam Group

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As of Thursday, the shortfall stood at Tk 2,000 crore.

Customers would no longer face difficulties in withdrawing funds, he said, adding that deposits last week exceeded withdrawals, resulting in a net positive balance.

Asked about actions against Islami Bank officials who assisted S Alam Group, Masud said: "We do not plan to take immediate action against junior officials right as it could destabilise the bank."

However, senior officials who were involved are already being removed, and all responsible parties will be dealt with according to the law.

"No one will escape accountability, and no wrongful removals will occur either."

At the meeting with Mansur, Masud presented a roadmap to address the bank's crisis in three phases.

The first phase, which will end on December 31, will focus on recovery.

The second phase, which will be between 2026 and 2027, will mark a "turnaround", while the third phase, from 2027 to 2029, will focus on moving the bank forward.

S Alam Group, a Chattogram-based business group blessed by former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, occupied the bank, the largest private lender by deposits in 2017, by force.

Once a profitable bank, its financial health took a nosedive after S Alam Group gained control in 2017.

After taking control of the board, S Alam Group and its associated companies took Tk 74,900 crore loans from the bank, which is 47 percent of Islami Bank's total outstanding loans as of March this year, according to the bank's documents.

Restore caretaker govt system

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Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana did not attend the press conference due to illness and Anisur Rahman did not show up as he was against announcing the resignation at a press meet, said an election commissioner.

However, the two later confirmed The Daily Star that they stepped down.

A group of people demonstrated in front of the EC office demanding punishment of the commissioners for holding a lopsided general election on January 7. Some of them also threw shoes at the vehicles carrying Alamgir, Anisur and Rashida when they were leaving the office after resignation.

The CEC left the EC Secretariat in a friend's car.

In the afternoon, a Bangabhaban press statement said President Mohammed Shahabuddin accepted the resignations of the CEC and his four deputies.

The resignations came exactly a month after then prime minister Sheikh Hasina quit and fled to India on August 5 in the face of a student-led mass uprising. The president dissolved the 12th parliament the following day.

EC officials said the commissioners decided to quit as there is a constitutional obligation for the commission to hold general elections within 90 days after the dissolution of a parliament.

The Awal-led commission took office on February 27, 2022.

The EC had been at the centre of controversy during the Awami League rule. The Awal-led commission was criticised for holding the January 7 national polls in which the AL had to field dummy independent candidates, many of whom were from the party, to make the polls appear participatory.

WHAT THE CEC SAID

Reading out a written statement at the press meet, Awal yesterday said that there was controversy over the 1973 parliamentary polls, as well as over the 1979 and 1987 general elections held under military rulers. The Jatiya Sangsad elections in 1991 and 1996, held under caretaker governments, were acceptable despite some criticism of "major or minor irregularities".

He said the 2008 general election was not free from controversy.

The CEC said the 2014 election was not inclusive and no comment was needed for the 2018 national polls. The last parliamentary polls held on January 7 this year was not inclusive as the major opposition BNP and its like-minded parties boycotted the elections, he added.

According to Awal, holding an election is a very difficult job, and the blame for an unacceptable election has always been put solely on the EC.

He said an EC may be dishonest or biased, but all the commissions cannot be so. The EC may be unable to hold acceptable elections for various reasons.

"There were controversies over elections as those were not inclusive. This criticism is valid and reasonable."

The CEC put forward some proposals on holding elections. He said Bangladesh could be an ideal place for holding polls under a proportional representation system due to the homogeneity of its population.

It could be easier and more effective to organise a national election in four to eight phases, with a

break of three to five days between each phases, he observed.

Awal said that the use of technology in the election process, including the submission of nomination papers online, should continue.

"Moreover, achieving the objectives of an election can be further ensured through holding every general election under a non-party caretaker government."

In January 2007, then CEC MA Aziz and all other election commissioners resigned amid political turmoil after the announcement of the state of emergency on January 11.

Former CEC Justice AKM Sadek, who was mired in deep controversy over holding the lopsided parliamentary polls on February 15, 1996, also stepped down in April that year.

In the wake of a street agitation, ex-CEC Abu Hena resigned on May 8, 2000. Former CEC Justice Sultan Hossain Khan quit within 10 months of taking office on December 24, 1990. The development came a few days after the fall of military ruler HM Ershad.

anti-India slogans such as "Beware, the agents of Awami League" and "Delhi or Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka!"

Akhter Hossen, convener of Chhatra Shakti and former leader of Dhaka University Central Students' Union, said the country will resist if any other fascist force wants to grab the power.

"The participation of thousands of people today proves that the sacrifices of our martyrs cannot be allowed to go in vain."

Similar processions were brought out in other parts of the country, including Chattogram.

Unveil a roadmap for reforms

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identification and trial of the corrupt officials and collaborators of the Awami League government, arrest of the perpetrators of the mass killings, and declaring the Gono Bhaban as July Memorial Museum.

Meanwhile, Sports and Youth Adviser Asif Mahmud, who is also a leader of the student movement, declared the Gono Bhaban as the mass revolution memorial museum at a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy.

Information Adviser Nahid Islam, another key

protest leader, also assured the families of the victims of government support. Speaking to the family of a victim at the Secretariat, he said it is the government's responsibility to ensure wellbeing of the families of those martyred during the mass uprising.

Several thousand students and general people carrying the national flag and placards participated in yesterday's 'Shaheedi March' from Dhaka University. They chanted slogans remembering slain students, including Abu Sayed and Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho.

They marched to the Central Shaheed Minar via Nilkhet, Science Lab, Kalabagan, Manik Miah Avenue, Bijoy Sarani, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar and Shahbagh. Many passersby were seen clapping, waving towards the crowd and filming the programme on their mobile phones.

Sarjis Alam, one of the coordinators of the platform, said at the Shaheed Minar that the students are ready to sacrifice their lives like the martyrs of the movement.

The participants of the march also shouted